

Elected Officials and Advocates Call on Mayor to Restore Funding for At-Risk LGBT Youth

Tuesday, 14 October 2008

NEW YORK, NY ‐ Today at the Ali Forney Center, in conjunction with National Coming Out Day on Saturday, October 11, Congressman Jerrold Nadler, Borough President Scott Stringer, State Senator Tom Duane, Assemblymembers Dick Gottfried and Deborah Glick, and Ali Forney Executive Director Carl Siciliano, urged Mayor Bloomberg to restore essential funding for homeless and at-risk LGBT youth in New York City. The press conference coincided with a letter, sent today, by elected officials to the Mayor.

Recently, the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene announced that it would discontinue all outreach contracts funded through the federal Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS (HOPWA) program at the expiration of the current contract in June of 2009. Ali Forney, a unique and comprehensive service organization for at-risk LGBT youth, relies exclusively on \$600,000 in annual funding through HOPWA for its drop-in medical services program. Loss of those services would result in a disastrous service gap for homeless LGBT youth in New York City.

According to the City, HIV infection rates among “Men who Sleep with Men” aged 13 to 29 increased by 33% between 2001 and 2006, and African-Americans and Latinos constitute over three-quarters of the new infections. If we cut outreach and preventative care for these teenagers and 20-somethings, this public health crisis will only grow.

“Ali Forney’s Drop-In Center is literally a lifesaving service for hundreds of local LGBT kids,” noted Rep. Jerrold Nadler. “Without this program, many of these already at-risk New Yorkers would be cut off from all medical and professional intervention. We must all work together ‐ City, Elected Officials and advocates ‐ to make sure that these people do not slip between the cracks.”

“The Ali Forney Center is at the forefront of providing vital services to the at risk population of homeless LGBT youth in New York City,” said Manhattan Borough President Scott M. Stringer. “Without funding from HOPWA the Ali Forney Center would be in true jeopardy. It is imperative that the City continue to support critical HOPWA funded outreach programs, such as those at the Ali Forney Center.”

“Too often, the effort to reform programs and service delivery results in critical and unique services being sacrificed,” said

Assemblymember Glick. "If the City does not rethink this misguided decision, this will be another one of those cases."

Assembly Member Dick Gottfried, Chair of the NYS Assembly Health Committee added: "The Ali Forney drop-in center provides a necessary service not found anywhere else in the city. As it is, every night, Ali Forney is forced to turn away young people in search of safe shelter. Where will they go now?"

"At a time when new HIV infections between young men who have sex with men are skyrocketing, the loss of Ali Forney's drop-in center for homeless LGBT youth would be particularly unfortunate," said State Senator Tom Duane. "This population is at particularly high risk of HIV infection and is in desperate need of the prevention services, medical care and connection to housing that the Ali Forney Center uniquely provides."

Text of the letter sent today is included below:

October 14, 2008

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg

City Hall

New York,
NY 10007

Dear Mayor Bloomberg:

We are writing to urge you to reconsider your decision to end all HOPWA (Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS) funded outreach programs when the current contract period terminates in June 2009. I am particularly concerned about the \$600,000 awarded to The Ali Forney Center, which depends entirely on this money to operate its Day Center located at 527 West 22nd St., 1st Floor, New York, NY 10011. While many non-profits will be experiencing similar problems in the coming months, the Ali Forney drop-in center provides a necessary service not found anywhere else in the city.

The LGBT population experiences unique impacts of homelessness. According to a report issued by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force in 2006, "the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reports the fact that LGBT youth live in a society that discriminates against and stigmatizes homosexuals; makes them more vulnerable to mental health issues than heterosexual youth. Additionally, homeless LGBT youth are at high risk of HIV infection and drug abuse. The National Runaway Switchboard, reports that LGBT homeless youth are seven times more likely than their heterosexual peers to be victims of crime. As of 2006, 60% of beds for homeless youth were provided by Covenant House, a facility where the LGBT community report that they have been threatened, belittled and abused by staff and other youth because of their sexual identity or gender identity.

The Ali Forney Center (AFC) was founded in 2002 in response to the shortage of safe emergency housing and supportive services to homeless LGBT youth in New York City. Since opening its doors, it has become clear that the services provided by the Ali Forney Center are one of a kind and in high demand. Each night, AFC is forced to turn away young people in search of safe shelter.

In 2004, The Ali Forney Center was awarded a grant from HOPWA to provide street outreach and support services. The grant created the vital drop-in center which offers medical counseling and treatment, psychosocial evaluation, group therapy, and activities. Just last year, this HOPWA grant was doubled to \$600,000 providing for the continued expansion of services, culminating with a uniquely comprehensive drop-in center for the LGBT youth population.

The defunding of the Ali Forney's drop-in services would have a devastating effect on the lives of one of the city's most vulnerable and underserved populations. The Ali Forney Center provides a unique set of comprehensive services and the loss of these services would result in a catastrophic loss for the LGBT community.

Sincerely,

JERROLD L. NADLER, Member of Congress

CHRISTINE C. QUINN, Speaker of the New York City Council

SCOTT STRINGER, Manhattan Borough President

THOMAS K. DUANE, State Senator

RICHARD GOTTFRIED, Assemblymember

DEBORAH GLICK, Assemblymember

ROSIE MENDEZ, New
York City
Councilmember

LEWIS A. FIDLER, New
York City Councilmember